
GUEST EDITORIAL

RACE, SEX, ECONOMICS, AND TOBACCO ADVERTISING

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I begin with a bias we all might share: the quality of health in a neighborhood, city, state, people, or country is the most sensitive and important determinant of the quality of life of that neighborhood, city, state, people, or country. Health is the point at which all social forces converge and express themselves most clearly and with the most impact.

It is clear that our major health problems are to an extraordinary extent the result of, and are affected by, the influences of the world around us and how we as individuals react to those influences. We know too well that heart disease, lung disease, and cancer kill our citizens at incredible rates, consume enormous amounts of increasingly precious health care resources, and demand our most energetic efforts. We also know that cigarette smoking is a common denominator for all of these diseases.

Simply put, we know that smoking is the single most important preventable cause of death in the United States, killing an estimated 390 000 Americans each year, or more than 1000 deaths a day.¹ Smoking alone accounts for 143 000 deaths from cardiovascular disease and 106 000 lung cancer deaths each year. Lung cancer—87% of which results from cigarette smoking—is the leading cause of cancer deaths in men and now, unfortunately, also in women.

In an analysis reported in this journal, cigarette smoking is a major contributing factor in the black-white health gap that exists in the District of Columbia.² Among blacks aged 20 and over, 32% of all deaths in 1985 were attributed to cigarette smoking, signifi-

cantly greater than the 25% among whites. Both percentages, of course, are far too high. Black men bear the greatest disease burden. Although drugs and homicides capture the headlines, cigarette smoking quietly and insidiously accounted for an estimated 40% of all deaths among District adult black men.

Of course, we are outraged that a \$35-billion-a-year tobacco industry continues to exact this enormous toll through the willful, skillful, premeditated, deliberate, and meticulously refined manipulation of the psychology of the American people through the use of images, symbols, and illusions. There is a meanness to this greed that is unprecedented in its intensity, tenacity, and consequences. It is unjustifiable by any standard of humanity. It is a disgrace.

It is also unnecessary. Cigarette smoking is not a need. It is not enjoyable, not fun; it is addictive. There are no significant differences between one cigarette product and another. They are sold to us with myth and illusion. One advertiser has described cigarette advertising as “advertising in the purest sense. There is no product difference, just the perception of the difference in the product.” More than \$2.5 billion a year is spent in accomplishing this illusion. A responsible advertiser, whose agency refuses to advertise cigarettes, has stated, “What we do is to generate need. The nature of advertising is to persuade, to create insecurities in the consumer that only the advertiser can fulfill.”³

The tobacco industry claims that the purpose of their advertising is to retain market share or to steal from their competitors. Yet, only 10% of smokers switch brands in any one year. In fact, the industry must recruit 5000 new smokers each day just to replace the smokers who quit or die.

CIGARETTE ADVERTISING: VICTIMIZING THE VICTIMS

Where do the cigarette companies go to find these

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new recruits for the death march to the land of profit and greed? They go not only to the children, but also to the other vulnerable and oppressed segments of our country. They go to the people of color, to women, and to the poor.⁴ It is a conscious, deliberate, and, as Dr Edwin Fisher has said, “a predatory strategy to further victimize the victims, with the only purpose, the sole goal, to make money.”⁵ No other activity is achieved and no other purpose is realized. All that is achieved is that a few people get rich, and a large number of people get sick. What possible arguments, no matter how convoluted, can justify this abomination? A \$35 billion industry versus a minority population that suffers from 60 000 excess premature deaths every year compared with the white population.⁶ The single greatest risk factor for premature death, of course, is cigarette smoking.

The tobacco industry is subjugating people of color through disease. You cannot educate people if you get sick. You cannot keep your job if you are ill. You do not function, you do not challenge, you do not confront the status quo if you are ill.

There are already too few resources in minority America to solve the chronic health problems that exist, not to mention the federal government retrenchment on resources, the lack of manpower, and the AIDS epidemic that will consume new money available for health care. It is hard to get well once you become sick, so what agenda could be more important than the health agenda? What could be more important than fighting the cigarette issue?

Fighting the cigarette issue means fighting the well-developed tobacco industry strategy aimed at minorities. The first purpose of their strategy is, of course, to sell their product. They seek to sustain and expand sales to minorities, women, and the poor; to make it difficult for those who smoke to quit; to induce those who have quit smoking to relapse; and to increase consumption in those who are already addicted. The second purpose is to undermine the efforts to mobilize against smoking. The third purpose is to frame the right to smoke as a civil rights issue. Ultimately, the strategy is to try to package the image of being champions of the downtrodden, the image of credibility.

Let us examine the importance of this imagery. We are well aware of the growing gulf between our country's poor and minorities and the rest of America in the control over and the access to the resources and conveniences of this society. In the climate of the narcissistic 1980s, fueled by “Entertainment Tonight,” *People* magazine, and “Lifestyles of the

Rich and Famous,” these inequities take on a particular individual urgency and frustration. The entire country has developed a collectively shared illusion. To the extent that your reality differs from that collective understanding of the way to be, you become variably insecure.

One reaction to the state of inequality is to devote yourself completely and thoroughly to maximizing the opportunities for success to put yourself in a condition mentally and physically so that you will be able to maximize your ability to work and to be healthy.

Unfortunately, a far too common reaction is to feed yourself with greater and greater doses of illusion and diminish the opportunities for real success. We buy more cigarettes to be more like the image in our mind. We take more time watching more TV, smoking more cigarettes, and thinking that we have an approximate way of accomplishing what we think we want to be. But we do less work, get more sick, and have the capacity to do less work.

The tobacco industry's insidious strategy is not confined to advertising in the limited sense. What we are concerned about are five elements: advertising, the sponsorship of events, promotion, philanthropy, and political campaign financing.

Advertising

The values that are promoted in tobacco advertising are clear. They are images and symbols of success elegance, power, sexual conquests, the macho role, and an enhanced ability to be sociable, self-assured, confident, daring, adventurous, and mature. The cruel irony, of course, is that the people who are all of those things do not smoke cigarettes. You declare your own inadequacy by smoking and the tobacco companies laugh all the way to the bank.

We are besieged by these images in our community, and minorities, women, and poor people are besieged by them in their publications. We know that Philip Morris is the largest advertiser in the Latino and Hispanic communities, and R.J. Reynolds is the 10th leading advertiser in the Hispanic media. We know that 12% of *Essence* magazine's budget and \$3.3 million of *Ebony* magazine's budget comes from the makers of death and disease. We know that over the last 5 years hundreds of pages of ads have gone into magazines like *MS* and *Cosmopolitan*.

In the early days of tobacco marketing, cigarette companies portrayed blacks in an unflattering way to sell cigarettes to white consumers. In recent times, blacks have become the direct targets of the cigarette

companies. Today, for example, a brown cigarette called "More" is targeted to black women, so that "more" black women smoke "More" cigarettes, and "more" black women get cancer, and of course, the tobacco industry makes "more" money. Not much has changed since the early 1900s except that exploitation now comes in more sophisticated packages.

Newspapers have become dependent on tobacco advertising just as magazines have. Last fall, the keynote speaker of the first Black Journalism Hall of Fame induction ceremony was the vice president of Philip Morris. Philip Morris brought the black publishers to New York City, where they heard that today tolerance for smoking may be under attack. Tomorrow it may be tolerance for someone else's right to pray or the right to choose a place to live. So, the publishers were told, the real issue is *not* smoking versus not smoking, it is discrimination versus tolerance. That is absolute nonsense.

The media not only disseminate, legitimize, and reinforce this message to smoke, but these media outlets are constrained from printing antismoking health information. It is already difficult to reach people of color to remind them of the importance of the health problems that afflict us and to tell them that these diseases are due to how we behave, the choices we make, and the chances we take. If we cannot talk about these issues in the only media that we own or influence, then what have we left to do? Stand on street corners with bullhorns and say, "By the way, this is what you need to do in order to save your life"? There are precious few outlets. Over a 5-year period, *MS* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines each had only one article on smoking. The *Cosmopolitan* article presented data correlating heavy smoking with a decreased chance of developing endometrial carcinoma.³ *Cosmopolitan* magazine has rejected advertisements for antismoking clinics. How do you get the message out to women? Helen Gurley Brown says, "Who needs someone you are paying millions of dollars to, to come and bite you on the ankle?" (*Washington Post*. December 11, 1985:A1,A18). When Helen Gurley Brown self-censors we cannot get the word out.

One third of all billboards advertise tobacco and alcohol. Tobacco companies spend \$1.4 million in the Hispanic community and \$5.8 million in the black community on billboard advertising alone.⁷ In St. Louis, three times as many billboards were in the black community as in the white community. Of those in the black community, 62% advertised cigarettes and alcohol, compared with 36% in the white community.⁸

In a poor black area of Philadelphia, there were 73 billboards in one 19-block stretch; one was empty, six had public service announcements, and the rest had alcohol and tobacco advertising (*Philadelphia Inquirer*. June 29, 1989:D1).

We have the same problem in the District of Columbia. In a survey conducted by junior high school students, three out of every four publicly displayed advertisements in the city were for tobacco and alcohol. Wards 7 and 8, which have about 95% black and 18% low income residents, had more than half of all the tobacco and alcohol advertisements in the entire District. Ward 3, which is predominantly white, had the fewest ads (*Washington Post*. February 7, 1988).

We cannot ignore these billboards; they are ubiquitous in people's front yards and across the street from schools. In Washington, DC, Tops cigarette rolling papers were being advertised 100 feet away from two high schools. We complained because Tops cigarette rolling papers are also used to roll marijuana cigarettes. Tops protested that the papers were not for drugs but for cigarettes. I could not explain to them that there was no difference. I had no right to get a bulldozer and knock the billboard down, so I went to the *Washington Post* and they reported it. They interviewed the billboard company, who said that their contract with the manufacturing company for the rolling papers specifically said to target low-income neighborhoods. This was deliberate, malicious, and predatory behavior. Tops said they were doing the poor, minority community a favor because it was economically cheaper to roll their own cigarettes.

Young children see these ads everywhere; they are visible pollution in our eyes. You cannot read the Surgeon General's warning, especially not from across town, but you can see the billboards from everywhere. All the controls and constraints that we are concerned about are avoided.

Sponsorship of Events

The tobacco industry seeks to gain "innocence by association" through sponsorship of events. They attempt to make cigarette brand names synonymous with community events like the Ebony Fashion Fair, the Kool Jazz Festivals, and Salsa Festivals in the Latino community.

Promotion

Promotion refers to the distribution of free samples, rebates for cartons that encourage people who are poor and have a financial incentive to buy in bulk to

consume more, and “points of purchase” displays with no warning labels in the stores. Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds have incredible opportunities to market in grocery stores, supermarkets, and convenience stores because Morris owns General Foods and Reynolds owns Nabisco (*Washington Post*. May 18, 1986).

Philanthropy

Philip Morris gave \$2.4 million to the local chapters of 180 black, Hispanic, and women’s groups in 1987. This was separate from the money they gave as part of their General Foods Foundation. R.J. Reynolds gave \$1.9 million to 49 minority organizations. In terms of scholarships, the United Negro College Fund received \$267 000 from R.J. Reynolds, \$120 000 from Philip Morris, and \$32 000 from Brown and Williamson (*Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 7, 1988).

Philip Morris brought together presidents of black colleges on Martin Luther King Jr’s birthday. To quote from the Philip Morris speech, “Anyone can make a profit in the short term. We are thinking about profits 10 years from now as well. Good citizenship is as important as an investment in research and development” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 7, 1988). So they are telling the 18-year-olds going to college is, “We gave you all the money for your education, so you owe us access to your markets. We decided that we have a monopoly on that, we own this, and we tell you now that we are looking for profits 10 years down the road regardless of the consequences.” The presidents of the black colleges sat there and listened to this?

Political Campaign Financing

The National Black Caucus’s state legislators last year received \$60 000 from Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, and the Tobacco Institute. The Caucus’s computer system was revamped courtesy of the Tobacco Institute. In 1987, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation received \$175 000; and the National Urban League received \$400 000 (*Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 7, 1988). Our respected friend and colleague Vernon Jordan sits on the board of R.J. Reynolds; Mrs Margaret Young, widow of Mr Whitney Young, sits on the board of Philip Morris (*Los Angeles Times*. May 22, 1988).

THE TRAGIC IMPACT OF TOBACCO ADVERTISING

The results of the tobacco industry’s multifaceted strategy are:

1. Legitimizing the cigarette industry. The result of the tobacco advertising and promotion strategy is to associate its industry with socially acceptable causes and to associate its cigarettes with health, vitality, sex, and power. The reality, unfortunately, is that, within the minority community, cigarette companies have largely succeeded in this objective. While the community cries out against cocaine, PCP, and other addictive drugs, leaders largely remain silent about the biggest addictive killer of them all.

2. Suppressing the issue of smoking and health. A confidential memo leaked from the Tobacco Institute stated, “We began intensive discussions with representatives of key women’s organizations. Most have assured us that, for the time being, smoking is not a priority issue.”³ It is our responsibility to make sure that “for the time being” ended yesterday.

3. Creating unusual alliances to distort the issues and obstruct tobacco control efforts. In New York City, a clean indoor air ordinance was vigorously debated. Who fought it? The NAACP, the Coalition of Black Women, and the National Police Association. Philip Morris wrote that this issue was a perfect backdrop for employers to discriminate against minorities because minorities often hold positions without access to private offices and therefore would be unfairly affected by the smoking ordinances. So, instead of working to save the lives of their constituencies, these organizations were co-opted by tobacco industry rhetoric. They actually argued for opportunities and incentives to end their people’s lives sooner.

COUNTERING THE TOBACCO ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

So what can we do to confront the reality that so many of our brothers and sisters are tragically dying from this silent epidemic? In the face of the overwhelming evidence that cigarette companies target minorities, I have several suggestions.

1. All publications should be lobbied to stop taking advertisements, not just minority publications, but all of them. *Essence*, *Ebony*, and the other minority magazines have a special responsibility because the consequences are so much greater for their readership. This means that when I go to a reception and network with people from private industry, it is my responsibility to get those people to bring more corporations’ advertising dollars into *Essence* and other minority magazines. Black people use many consumer items other than alcohol and cigarettes. If I could tell the magazine editors that we have brought them \$2

million from nontobacco ads, then I could ask them to cancel \$2 million worth of cigarette advertising. We have to be more vigorous about what we bring into the discussion.

2. Insist that editorial responsibility cannot be abrogated, especially by minority media. It is simply a moral issue and the question must be called. We have to take every opportunity to hold these people accountable.

3. Remove billboards within 1000 feet of schools, churches, and places where children gather. We need to remove all existing billboards or ensure that at least there are as few in the minority community as in the white community. If the white community does not want billboards in their community that's fine. Let's get rid of ours and even it out. I'm all for equality.

4. Stop supporting and patronizing tobacco-sponsored events. I do not think it is right to go to the Ebony Fashion Fair anymore, with the free cigarette samples and models smoking. We have to walk away from these events. Recently, I was invited to a major dinner event in Washington, DC. I felt honored to be invited with so many national black dignitaries. When I arrived, there was a pack of cigarettes at every place. I had to make a decision: I had to get up and leave the event. Everywhere I go I talk about that. I will hold the people that held the event responsible. It was wrong and I resented it. As a Commissioner of Public Health, I should not have been put in that position. I feel violated by it.

5. Stop accepting tobacco philanthropy. I am aware that reasonable people find themselves forced to debate and agonize whether their civil rights or minority organization should accept money or resources offered by tobacco companies. Let us remind ourselves that tobacco companies actively seek to associate their products with noble or worthwhile causes to increase the social acceptability of the product, with the ultimate goal of increased cigarette sales. Very rarely is the philanthropy truly altruistically based and usually implicitly or explicitly co-ops the organization into the overall goals of the industry. Therefore, the best course of action is not to accept these donations.

However, some organizations find that their very survival depends on the philanthropy of the tobacco industry. As a black health commissioner, I would hope that every reasonable step would be taken to ensure that accepting this money does not, in any way, impede or dissuade the receiving organization's ability to advocate for the health of its constituency.

The silence of our organizations and institutions may

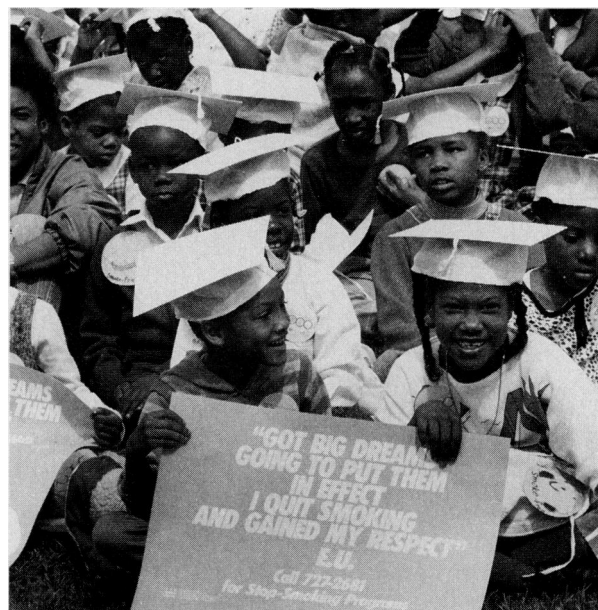


Figure. Smoke Free Class of the Year 2000 celebration.

be either explicitly bought by cigarette companies or result from self-censorship by minority organizations fearful of losing tobacco industry donations. It would be truly unfortunate if this economic blackmail prohibited civil rights and other organizations from supporting rational workplace no-smoking policies, banning the distribution of free cigarette samples, limiting tobacco advertising and promotion, and other no-smoking measures that protect the health of those at greatest risk—women, youth, and minorities.

6. Use community organizations to educate, organize, and serve as a moral conscience in the fight against needless death from cigarettes. We will need to fight cigarette advertising with our constituencies because they are very powerful. Coalition building in this pivotal effort is important. When we organize for health, we gain great strength.

In the District, many community organizations and leaders have expressed their concern about cigarette smoking and health. As part of Cancer Prevention Month, a poster campaign was sponsored by our 20-member Cancer Consortium encouraging our youth not to be seduced by the cigarette companies. Experience Unlimited, one of the leading rap groups in the nation, volunteered to serve as positive role models for the poster campaign. The posters were “hot items” at our Smoke Free Class of the Year 2000 celebration (Figure). The 2000 elementary school students from 49 schools have all vowed to remain smoke free through

TABLE. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TOBACCO USE IN AMERICA CONFERENCE

To protect the health of children:

1. Establish age 21 as a minimum age for purchase of tobacco products.
2. Ban the sale of tobacco products through vending machines.
3. Ban the distribution of free samples of tobacco products through the mail and on public property.
4. Require federally funded educational institutions to provide a smoke-free environment for children.

To protect the health of women and minorities:

5. Increase federal funding for research on how to decrease tobacco use by minority groups and women.
6. Fund strong antismoking public service advertisements, as well as a paid counter-advertisement campaign.
7. Provide grants to minority health professional and other organizations to support programs to prevent tobacco use and to help smokers stop.

To protect the health of all Americans:

8. Eliminate the tax deduction for tobacco advertising and promotional expenditures.
9. Increase the budget of the Office on Smoking and Health for antismoking programs, and the Office of Minority Health for antismoking initiatives targeting minorities.
10. Provide additional federal funding for antismoking activities within existing federal public health programs serving women, children, and minorities.

Source: Tobacco Use in America Conference: Final Report and Recommendations from the Health Community to the 101st Congress. Co-sponsored by the American Medical Association, the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, and the American Heart Association. January 27-28, 1989.

their graduation in the year 2000. Experience Unlimited will help them achieve this health goal. Now, isn't this the correct image that we want our community to portray about smoking?

7. Recognize smoking for what it is by helping those who are addicted. The Surgeon General has recognized that "smoking nicotine" is a powerful addiction. Many people want to quit and need our sympathy and support. Many people who want to quit need help. Private and public health insurance should pay for smoking cessation programs, just as they pay for alcohol and drug treatment programs.

PROTECTING WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND MINORITIES

On January 27 and 28, 1989, key members of Congress, concerned citizens, and representatives of health and lay organizations convened a Tobacco Use in America Conference. A dominant issue of the conference was how to reduce smoking dramatically among our nation's children, young women, minorities, less educated, and the poor. They recognized that most tobacco users get hooked on nicotine while teenagers. Their report stated that "the tobacco industry clearly recognizes the need to recruit additional smokers to insure its very survival and this had led to targeting of certain identified groups: women, children, and minorities."

The conference representatives recommended 10 federal antitobacco initiatives to protect the health of all Americans, especially women, children, and minorities (Table). Minority health professional, civil rights, and community organizations should take a careful look at these important recommendations. After all, it is our community that has the greatest stake in these policies.

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